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*The NORWICH and NORFOLK Weavers ANSWER to the PETITION and
CASE of the Wool-Combers;*

Humbly offered to the Consideration of the Parliament.

SOME Wool-Combers in *Suffolk* and parts adjacent, being notoriously known to make false and defective Yarn, and having sometimes deservedly suffered for such their Offences, who being uneasy under the same, as it's common for all Offenders so to be, are therefore very industrious to obtain such an Alteration in the Law, as that they may for the future make and vend their defective Yarn unmolested; and in order to that end have presented a Petition to the Honourable House of Commons, and printed a Case, complaining of great Hardships and unjust Prosecutions against them by the Wardens and Assistants of the Company of Weavers.

And notwithstanding their Complaints are for the most part false, malicious, and unreasonable, and delivered in abusive and skurrulous Language, with odious Comparisons, yet we think it not proper to Reply in such a Dialect, but shall only give a modest and true Answer to the most material Parts of their Petition and Case, which is humbly submitted to consideration.

The Petition and Case sets forth, *That whereas the Weavers of the City of Norwich and County of Norfolk obtained an Act of Parliament the Fourteenth Year of King Charles the Second, whereby they are empowered to search and seize all Worsted Yarn Reeled short or false, in all Fairs, Markets, and other Publick places of Sale in the City and County of Norwich and Norfolk: And to lay a Fine upon such Yarn so defective as a Jury shall find, not exceeding a Moiety thereof, &c. But that contrary to the very Letter of the Law (though under pretext thereof) they have made great spoil of the Wool-Combers, by seizing and rifling the Waggons of common Carriers, and breaking open private Chambers and Ware-houses, with divers other exorbitant proceedings; That the Exactions of the Wardens (who are both Searcher, Seizer, Judge and Jury) are swallowed up in unnecessary Charges, or consumed riotously in Treats: To prevent which, they humbly pray and propose,*

That the Wool-Combers may be empowered to punish the Spinster by some Corporal Infliction or Penalty for making false Yarns.

That if any Yarn be found defective, then instead of laying a Fine thereupon, the same may be cut in pieces, &c.

To all which it is answered;

That the Company of Wardens and Assistants have all along taken great care to act according to the Powers granted them by the said Act of Parliament, and have rather been too remiss than severe in Prosecuting Offenders.

That there are yearly chosen 42 Wardens and Assistants, and if at any time any particular Officer hath, through Mistake, Ignorance, or too much Zeal to remedy the Abuses and Evils by the said Act intended to be redressed, seized any defective Yarns in any place, where according to the Letter of the Law the same was not seizable, such Actions have not been allowed of by the Company, and therefore (it's hoped) ought not to be charged upon them as a Crime.

That the Moneys arising by the Fines of defective Yarns, (which Yarns have not been condemned by the Wardens, as is falsely suggested) have not been consumed in unnecessary Charges, or riotously in Treats, but have been applied as the Law directs.

That many of the Wool-combers have used indirect means to avoid the Wardens search, by coming to *Norwich* sometimes upon the Sabbath day, sometimes in the Night, and by conveying their Yarn into private places, and there selling it to the great prejudice of all honest Traders: And therefore the Weavers, and all regular Wool-combers, have much greater reason to complain against such Practices, and pray that the Power of Search may be enlarged.

As to the inflicting a Corporal Punishment or Penalty upon the Spinster,

It's answered, That the Weavers are well content that a Punishment or Penalty may be inflicted upon the Spinster who shall make false Yarn; and are also desirous, and think it as reasonable and necessary, that a Punishment or Penalty may be inflicted upon the Wool-comber who shall tolerate, or knowingly allow or suffer them so to do, which hath been a practice too much used by many of them of late years.

As to the cutting of Yarns in pieces,

It's answered, That the Method was formerly used, but found so inconvenient; that when the last Act was made, it was thought fit by the Wisdom of that Parliament, that it should be turned into a Fine.

That for above Thirty years Experience the Method now used in fining defective Yarns hath been found to be of great service and benefit to the Weaving Trade, which has of late years been very much increased, to the great benefit and advantage of this Nation, and more especially to the clamorous Wool-combers.

That if any Wool-combers are desirous to have defective Yarn cut in pieces, they may now do it, and it will most properly be done by them at their Spinning-Houses before the Spinsters Faces, which may be a great means to deter them from making false Yarn for the future.

That the true Reason why the Petitioners are so industrious to obtain such a destructive Act (as we have great cause to believe) is the assurance they have, That if the Law be once made so severe, and there be nothing allowed towards the defraying the necessary Charges of Prosecution, or so oft as there be a great demand for Yarn, that thereupon the Prosecution will in a great measure, if not wholly cease, and then they should be at liberty to make and vend their defective Yarns unmolested, to the great prejudice, if not ruin of so ancient and beneficial a Trade as the Worstead-weaving Trade has been, and is to this Nation. And should that Trade fail the Wool-growers would soon find the ill effects thereof.

Whereas it is objected, *That it would be to the ruin of the Wool combers, their Wives and Children, to stand a Suit at Law against the Wardens when they seize their Yarns contrary to Law,*

It's answered, That the Wool-combers assert that they are above 500 substantial Traders who employ 150000 Families, and it seems very strange that the Prosecution of a Warden or Assistant, if he acts contrary to Law, should be to their ruin.

And whereas they say (by way of aggravation) *That where many of them pay One shilling Tax toward the Support of the Government, they pay Five to the Wardens.*

It's answered, That there hath not for Eight years last past been above 120 l. one Year with the other received for all the Fines of defective Yarns, which is a very inconsiderable Sum, considering the vast quantity of Yarns that must be made by 500 substantial Traders who employ 150000 Families.

That according to a modest computation the Yarns used by the Weavers fall short of what they would be worth, if made as the Law directs, at least 25000 l. per Annum, which is chiefly occasioned by the want of a greater Power to Search, and therefore it's hoped it will not be unreasonable that the Power of Search should be enlarged.

And whereas they say, *That some Weavers would serve the Office of a Warden gratis without costly Treats, voluptuous Banquets, or other private Advantages,*

It's answered, That all the Wardens and Assistants do serve without any reward for their great pains and troubles, other then the necessary and reasonable Charges and Expence upon that account, of which they give an exact account, which is allowed by the Justices of the Peace, as the Act directs in that case.

**The *Norwich* and *Norfolk*
Weavers Answer**

**To the Petition and Case of
the Wool-combers.**